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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000502

SIPDIS

STATE ALSO PASS TO USAID
STATE FOR TSUNAMI TASK FORCE 1
USAID/W FOR A/AID ANDREW NATSIOS, MMERTENS
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA
DCHA/OFDA KISAACS, GGOTTLIEB, MMARX, RTHAYER, BDEEMER
DCHA/FFP FOR LAUREN LANDIS
DCHA DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR WILLIAM GARVELINK
ANE DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR MARK WARD
BANGKOK FOR OFDA SENIOR REGIONAL ADVISOR TOM DOLAN
KATHMANDU FOR OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR WILLIAM BERGER
GENEVA FOR USAID KYLOH
ROME PASS FODAG
NSC FOR JMELINE
CDR USPACOM FOR J3/J4/POLAD
USEU PASS USEC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [AEMR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: USAID/OFDA DART TEAM MONITORING VISIT TO TSUNAMI-AFFECTED EAST AND SOUTH COASTS OF SRI LANKA

SUMMARY

1. MEMBERS OF THE USAID/OFDA DART TEAM VISITED THE HEAVILY AFFECTED EAST AND SOUTH COASTS OF SRI LANKA MARCH 2-7 TO MONITOR PROGRESS OF RELIEF ACTIVITIES AND ASSESS PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUED RECOVERY. AVAILABLE FUNDS ARE SUFFICIENT TO MEET RELIEF NEEDS IN THE DISTRICTS VISITED BUT IMPLEMENTATION FALLS SHORT. CASH-FOR-WORK PROJECTS FUNDED BY USAID/OFDA AND OTHER DONORS ARE HAVING A SUBSTANTIAL AND HIGHLY VISIBLE IMPACT IN ALL OF THE WORST HIT COASTAL AREAS. QUICK IMPACT PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY DAI ARE AMONG THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND COST-EFFECTIVE OFDA-FUNDED ACTIVITIES. THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO RECOVERY ALONG THE TSUNAMI-AFFECTED COASTLINE AT PRESENT IS UNCERTAINTY OVER GOSL RESTRICTIONS ON REBUILDING IN THE COASTAL ZONE. EVENTUAL RETURN OF DISPLACED PERSONS TO THEIR ORIGINAL LOCATIONS MAY BE INEVITABLE DESPITE CURRENT GOSL RESTRICTIONS. COORDINATION OF ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN DIFFICULT BUT IS NOW IMPROVING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. SURVIVORS ARE EMERGING FROM THE INITIAL TRAUMA OF THE DISASTER AND, WITH MANY VILLAGES BENEFITTING FROM CLEAN-UP EFFORTS, ARE INCREASINGLY INCLINED TO RETURN AND REBUILD THEIR LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS.

DART MONITORING VISIT

2. TWO USAID/OFDA DART TEAM MEMBERS JOINED BY MISSION FSN STAFF TRAVELED THE LENGTH OF THE TSUNAMI-AFFECTED COAST FROM TRINCOMALEE DISTRICT SOUTH TO HAMBANTOTA DISTRICT MARCH 2-7 TO MONITOR PROGRESS OF USAID/OFDA-FUNDED RELIEF PROJECTS AND ASSESS PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUED RECOVERY. THE TEAM MET WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS, SPOKE WITH AFFECTED FAMILIES, AND VISITED NUMEROUS OFDA-FUNDED PROJECT SITES IN TRINCOMALEE, BATTICALOA, AMPARA, AND HAMBANTOTA DISTRICTS. ABOUT 20,000 LIVES WERE LOST IN THESE FOUR DISTRICTS, NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF CONFIRMED DEATHS NATIONWIDE. BEYOND HAMBANTOTA THE TEAM CONTINUED TO COLOMBO ALONG THE HEAVILY-AFFECTED SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST COASTLINE BUT DID NOT CONDUCT SITE VISITS AS THIS AREA HAS BEEN WELL-MONITORED BY MISSION AND DART STAFF. USAID/OFDA DISASTER ASSISTANCE TO SRI LANKA FOR THE TSUNAMI TOTALS APPROXIMATELY USD 37 MILLION.

RELIEF PHASE: FULLY FUNDED BUT NOT FULLY IMPLEMENTED

3. AVAILABLE FUNDING FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PROJECTS IS CLEARLY SUFFICIENT TO MEET RELIEF REQUIREMENTS IN THE DISTRICTS VISITED, BUT IMPLEMENTATION STILL FALLS SHORT DUE TO LOGISTICAL DELAYS (E.G. TIMBER FOR TRANSITIONAL SHELTER IS BACK-ORDERED), COORDINATION DIFFICULTIES, AND CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE GOSL POLICY ON THE RETURN OF DISPLACED PEOPLE TO THE COASTAL ZONE (SEE PARAGRAPH SIX). IN SHORT THE RELIEF PHASE IS FULLY FUNDED BUT NOT FULLY IMPLEMENTED.

IMPACT OF CASH-FOR-WORK

4. ONGOING CASH-FOR-WORK PROJECTS FUNDED BY USAID/OFDA AND OTHER DONORS ARE HAVING A SUBSTANTIAL AND HIGHLY VISIBLE IMPACT IN ALL OF THE WORST HIT AREAS OF THE EAST AND SOUTH COASTS. REMOVAL OF DEBRIS, INCLUDING THOUSANDS OF TRUCKLOADS OF BRICK AND CONCRETE RUBBLE, COLLAPSED ROOFING, AND OTHER REMAINS OF DWELLINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE, HAS BEEN A CRITICAL FIRST STEP ENABLING RENEWED ACCESS TO RESIDENTIAL AREAS, ROADWAYS, MARKET AREAS, AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS. IN AREAS WHICH HAVE BEEN CLEARED OF DEBRIS, RESIDENTS CAN BE SEEN RETURNING TO SURVEY LOSSES, SALVAGE PROPERTY, OR ERECT MAKESHIFT FENCES TO DEMARCATe LAND IN HOPES OF EVENTUALLY REBUILDING ON IT.

DAI QUICK IMPACT PROJECTS

15. AMONG THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND COST-EFFECTIVE OFDA-FUNDED PROJECTS ARE THOSE IMPLEMENTED BY DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES INCORPORATED (DAI) THROUGH THE USAID/OTI SWIFT CONTRACT MECHANISM. DAI HAS RAPIDLY IMPLEMENTED AN IMPRESSIVE ARRAY OF SMALL GRANTS FOR INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIR, CLEAN-UP, AND LIVELIHOOD RECOVERY. IN MANY CASES USAID CONTRIBUTIONS OF MATERIAL, EQUIPMENT, OR TECHNICAL EXPERTISE ARE MATCHED WITH THE VOLUNTEER LABOR OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OR POLITICAL PARTIES.

MAJOR OBSTACLE TO RECOVERY

16. THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO RECOVERY ALONG THE TSUNAMI-AFFECTED COASTLINE AT PRESENT IS CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR RETURN OF DISPLACED TO THEIR LAND WITHIN THE SO-CALLED "BUFFER ZONE" OR COASTAL CONSERVATION ZONE, WHICH HAS BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE GOSL AS EITHER 100 OR 200 METERS FROM MEAN HIGH TIDE, DEPENDING ON THE DISTRICT. THIS UNCERTAINTY IS HOLDING UP SHELTER CONSTRUCTION (TRANSITIONAL AND PERMANENT) AND LIVELIHOOD RECOVERY, AS INVESTMENTS IN LIVELIHOODS ASSETS ARE CONTINGENT ON PROXIMITY TO THE COAST FOR FISHING FAMILIES AND OTHERS. IN THE DISTRICTS VISITED, THE COASTAL ZONE POLICY WAS THE SUBJECT OF INCESSANT DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS AMONG AFFECTED COMMUNITIES, HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS, AND LOCAL OFFICIALS WHO REPORTEDLY LONG FOR CLARITY FROM THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IN COLOMBO. AMIDST ALL THE TALK AND GOSL PRONOUNCEMENTS IT WAS THE PREDICTION OF THE CARE COORDINATOR IN AMPARA DISTRICT THAT RESONATED WITH THE VISITING DART TEAM AND IS PERHAPS THE MOST LIKELY SCENARIO: THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT POSITION WILL INEVITABLY HAVE TO GIVE WAY TO THE OVERWHELMING DESIRE OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF DISPLACED FAMILIES TO RETURN TO THE SITES OF THEIR ORIGINAL HOMES, EVEN WITHIN THE DEVASTATED 100 METER ZONE. SOME OF THESE FAMILIES ARE INDEED ALREADY RETURNING.

COORDINATION

17. INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL NGO PARTNERS IN THE EASTERN DISTRICTS REPORT THAT COORDINATION HAS IMPROVED CONSIDERABLY IN RECENT WEEKS. COORDINATION OF SECTORAL ACTIVITIES IS BEING PUSHED DOWN FROM THE DISTRICT LEVEL (DISTRICT AGENT) TO THE SUB-DISTRICT LEVEL (DIVISION SECRETARIAT). IN THE EARLY WEEKS COORDINATION MEETINGS HOSTED BY THE DISTRICT AGENTS REPORTEDLY DREW AS MANY AS 200 PEOPLE, MAKING EFFECTIVE COORDINATION NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF PRIVATE FUNDS RAISED BY NGOS HAVE ALSO POSED CHALLENGES FOR COORDINATION. LESS BEHOLDEN TO USAID AND OTHER DONORS, AND UNDER PRESSURE TO SPEND QUICKLY, MANY NGOS WERE LESS INCLINED TO COORDINATE EFFORTS. INTERNATIONAL NGOS (INGO) RECEIVING USAID TSUNAMI FUNDING IN SRI LANKA REPORT MATCHING THEIR USAID CONTRIBUTIONS FOUR OR FIVE FOLD WITH PRIVATE DONATIONS.

LOCAL NGO CAPACITY

18. EARLY REPORTS THAT LOCAL NGOS (LNGO) WERE UNDER-FUNDED OR IN SOME CASES EVEN IDLE WHILE MONEY POURED INTO INTERNATIONAL NGO OPERATIONS APPEAR TO BE NO LONGER VALID. ON THE CONTRARY, AT THIS POINT THE MAJOR LNGOS ARE GENERALLY BELIEVED TO BE FUNDED TO THE LIMIT OF THEIR ABSORPTION CAPACITY. SEWALANKA, SRI LANKA'S SECOND LARGEST, FOR EXAMPLE, HAS STOPPED ACCEPTING TSUNAMI DONATIONS. ONE UNFORTUNATE TREND HAS BEEN THE MIGRATION OF SOME OF THE BEST LNGO STAFF TO BETTER PAYING INGOS.

THE INITIAL TRAUMA FADES

19. THE DART HEARD REPORTS FROM NUMEROUS SOURCES THAT THE TRAUMA OF THE INITIAL PERIOD IS LESSENING TO THE POINT THAT SURVIVORS ARE INCREASINGLY INCLINED TO RETURN (EVEN THOSE WITHIN THE 100 METER ZONE) AND REBUILD THEIR LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS. MANY AFFECTED VILLAGES, WHILE NOT YET REBUILT, HAVE BEEN VISUALLY TRANSFORMED BY THE CLEAN-UP EFFORTS. THE BUZZ OF HEAVY EQUIPMENT AND CLEAN-UP CREWS GIVES AN IMPRESSION OF PROGRESS AND THAT A GRADUAL RETURN TO NORMALCY IS POSSIBLE. CLEAN-UP EFFORTS ON THE SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST COASTS HAVE GENERALLY PROGRESSED FURTHER THAN THEY HAVE IN THE EAST.

LUNSTEAD